



BOB BARR: Republicare: New name, same mess

Bob Barr

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Judging by all the smiling, smug faces gathered at the White House last week after House Republicans passed the much ballyhooed American Health Care Act (“AHCA”), one might be lead to believe they actually did what they promised to do — repeal Obamacare. And, in the typical logic-twisting of Beltway politicians, perhaps some of the GOP members probably believe they did. After all, the Republicans did pass a bill; it was sold as a replacement of the Affordable Care Act; and, Democrats acted like the sick and infirmed were to be suddenly cast into the street. Nevertheless, after the last cork pops and the confetti stops falling at the GOP’s self-congratulations party, they will be forced to answer constituents demanding to know, “Where’s the beef?”

Not every Republican was rushing to the bowl of victory punch. Rep. Justin Amash, who is an all-too-rare voice of objectivity among his more delusional colleagues, took to Facebook to criticize the new health care legislation, explaining his vote for it only as support for a “marginal improvement” to Obamacare, nothing more. “(Obamacare) will continue to drive up the cost of health insurance ... and the modifications contained in the AHCA cannot save it,” says Amash. “At best, it will make Obamacare less bad.”

Actually, Amash is being optimistic.

Regardless of the made-for-fundraising outrage of the Left, the ACHA does little to change the law it purports to replace. In fact, Cato Institute’s Michael Cannon suggests if enacted, in some very real respects, it could be even worse than its predecessor.

As Cannon and others have noted, for example, the ACHA fails to eliminate Obamacare’s onerous “community rating” price controls — which have sent insurance premiums skyrocketing for some, while reducing coverage for others. Cannon suggests the GOP’s half-hearted tinkering “will accelerate Obamacare’s race to the bottom.” Apparently, this is what passes as “reform” to Republicans.

While House Republicans may consider their attempt at reforming Obamacare a job well done, there is no excuse for how far short their “second draft” came to reaching anything that could remotely be considered genuine reform, much less a full “repeal.” As Amash noted, the new plan contains some good provisions, but, hailing the legislation as the “start of a new beginning,” as House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy called it, or pretending it to be some huge victory for

the free market, is pure Establishment spin to cover the GOP's lack of desire to fight the battles necessary to truly fix America's health care system once and for all.

As I have written previously, Republicans had seven years to draft a replacement for Obamacare, and then set the groundwork for passing it when the opportunity came. Yet, when the opportunity did come, we saw just how little Establishment Republicans had accomplished over those years. Instead of crafting a real free market approach to reform, convincing moderate Republicans and Democrats of its merits, and then patiently selling it to the American public as Obamacare continued to spiral downward, Republican leaders did what they frequently do — propose a last-minute, watered-down version of reform, and promising to “get it right” later.

We saw this in March, when House Republicans first proposed a version of reform that was summarily rejected by conservatives both in Congress, and on the outside. And, we saw them do it again this month, barely getting the “revised” AHCA through the House, and only after buying-off Republicans on the fence with hollow promises that states down the road might be able to opt out of certain provisions. It is a tactic all too familiar to anyone who understands how Washington operates — trading one's vote today for promises of future relief via some complicated formula, which rarely occurs.

Unfortunately for the GOP and its control of Congress in the future, they may not get out from under this failure. By leaving in place or slightly modifying many of Obamacare's worst provisions, and hoping to avoid others on the false hope that states will not succumb to pressure from pro-Obamacare lobbyists, all they have managed to do is make modest tweaks to a law, while assuming full responsibility for it down the road. The average voter will not remember, or care, it was Obama who passed the ball; only that Republicans were the last to get a fingertip on it before going out of bounds.

Perhaps the Senate will get it right. However, history suggests this will not be the case, and it is likely that the version of the AHCA emerging from the Senate will be essentially the same as the House version, or even worse after moderates in the Senate load it up with more Obamacare — like provisions that voters have come to consider part of their “right to health care.” For Americans hoping for a true, market-based reform of the health care system to which we are all now subject, however, Republicare will make little difference.